

Letter dated July 7, 1982 from Charlotte Thomson Iserbyt, 2324 19th Street, Washington, D.C. 20009 to President Ronald Reagan, The White House, Washington, D.C. 20600:

Dear President Reagan:

I understand that the White House has received many letters and petitions requesting that the Department of Education (DOE) be abolished, that Secretary Terrel Bel be asked to resign and replaced by a Secretary more in tune with your philosophy, and that grants and contracts relative to the Secretary's Technology Initiative be cancelled or broken. Friends of mine across the country inform me that they have either received no reply to their letters or that they are receiving replies from the Department of Education which do not even address their concerns.

Leading conservative organizations and media (national and state) are concerned that the Reagan agenda for education is hardly distinguishable from that of President Carter and the NEA. Your promise to abolish the NEA/Carter Department of Education did not include a promise to replace it with a foundation for education. Your publicly stated concerns over the issues of manipulation of school children and declining test scores were not couched in terms that would allow for the present continuation of federal support for the development, evaluation, and dissemination of behavior modification/ values clarification/social change curriculum and/or basic skills computer-based courseware (curriculum).

Why is it that scarce tax dollars continue to flow to education associations that publicly oppose and sneer at everything you stand for? The most recent example of this is the DOE's award of a contract to the Association for Educational Communications (AECT) to carry out Project BEST — Basic Education Skills through Technology. Are you aware that the advisory board of Project BEST includes education associations which have for years opposed any position or policy to the right of President Carter or Senator Kennedy. In fact, one of the prime beneficiaries of Project BEST (which will be strengthened by its significant role in the Project), and a member of the Advisory Board, is the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) which in a joint statement with the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), dated April 7, 1982, came out against many of your education proposals. The concluding paragraph of the joint statement released to the press follows:

"Briefly stated....CCSSO and NASBE Joint Legislative Conference speaker Haynes Johnson, a well-respected Washington Post commentator, mentioned that it appears that there is absolute consensus that we are headed down the wrong economic path...the one major dissenter, however, is the President, and he remains firm in his convictions. Johnson also predicted that President Reagan would be a one-term President."

As one of your long-time supporters (founder of the Maine Conservative Union in 1973 which is affiliated with the American Conservative Union), and as a former (recently resigned) political appointee in the Department of Education (served as Senior Policy Advisor to the Asst. Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement, which is the office handling the Secretary's Technology Initiative), I am infuriated that precious tax dollars are going to an organization (AECT) which includes on its Project BEST Advisory Board associations which have played a significant role in the decline of student test scores, which have been deeply involved in the controversy over humanistic education programs, and whose memberships include a good number of educators who supported the creation of the Department of Education and worked to elect President Carter in 1976 and 1980. It is unlikely President Carter would have rewarded conservative organizations that opposed his election with million dollar contracts.

What ever happened to the Reagan Revolution? Reagan appointees, who stood on principle and backed your philosophy to the hilt, have been asked to resign or have voluntarily resigned in disgust over the present policies of the Department of Education. How can your revolution take place without principled Reaganaut soldiers The educationist philosophy of the past thirty years, now cleverly couched in terms such as the "New Federalism", Partnerships with the Private Sector", etc., proceeds apace, and a strengthening of the very establishment you pledged to reduce, which has little or nothing to do with what actually goes on in our children's classrooms, continues without a hitch or a peep from the White House.

Cosmetic changes in the Department, i.e., the replacement of Carter liberals by Reagan conservatives on Advisory Boards, and the removal of a few controversial programs from the National Diffusion Network (NDN), etc., temporary changes which will disappear should there be a change in administrations, are of little or no significance. The abolition of the NDN, the federal government's transmission belt for federally-funded (developed) and evaluated programs, many of which deal with social change, and the abolition of the National Institute of Education (NIE), the left-wing education think tank (I know since I carefully went through many of its project files while on a 2-month detail to NIE), were essential steps for your administration to take. Why was this not done? Not only is the NDN securely in place, its federal control over curriculum

(federal bureaucrats evaluate programs before they can go into the NDN), has been strengthened by moving it into the Regional Offices where it is in an even better position to compete with the private sector in the business of selling its federally-supported products. Why is it that the highly-principled and respected NIE Director, Edward Curran, was forced to resign due to his courageous letter to you recommending that NIE be abolished, when you, Mr. President, promised the voters you would abolish the whole Department of Education, in which case NIE would have disappeared?

I am sure that if you could see how NIE wastes taxpayers' money on silly and controversial social change projects that support the growth of the very educational establishment you pledged to cut back (most of which includes organizations which lobbied against your proposed education cuts), you would be very upset over the decision, taken while you were in Europe, to request Mr. Curran's resignation. You would undoubtedly initiate an investigation of exactly what Secretary Bell is up to in "his" Department of Education, as opposed to what he leads the public to believe as a result of his speeches, etc. Plans for education in the eighties to which I have access, could not possibly please the Ronald Reagan I have come to admire, support, and believe in over the years.

Grassroots citizens, who worked day and night to get you elected, ask me "What is going on?" Since I am loyal to you, all I can say is "I guess the President isn't allowed to know what is really going on. If he were, he would certainly take steps to reverse the present course in the Department of Education."

I would like to meet with you to discuss the concerns of your constituency. I feel that nothing less than a personal, private meeting with you will allow you to know what is really going on. I look forward to a reply from the White House to this letter and to my request for a private meeting. I trust, since I have recently resigned from the Department, that your staff will not refer my letter to the Department for a reply. Thank you so much for everything you are trying to do for our great nation.

Sincerely,
Charlotte Thomson Iserbyt
Enclosures:

- (1) Human Events article entitled "Bell's Education Department Betrays Reagan Policies", May 22, 1982
- (2) Heritage Foundation "Education Update", April 1982, entitled "Reagan Revolution Stalled in Education Department".
- (3) The Washington Post article entitled "Conservatives Zap Idea of Pac-Man as Teacher", May 18, 1982.
- (4) Human Events "Capital Briefs", June 26, 1982, item on resignations of Charlotte Iserbyt (writer of this letter) and Dan Cathcart.
- (5) "Project BEST" Dissemination Design Considerations, taken from Project BEST documents. "Project Design Features (What we can control or manipulate?)"
- (6) Page from Georgia Basic Life Process Skills Plan, funded by Department of Education
- (7) Georgia Department of Education — Narrative Response — Project BEST. This document proves connection with Enclosure No. 6